



MARRY *For* MURDER

by Carmen Morrison

PHILIP ALDEN edged away from two intense lady poets loudly discussing Robinson Jeffers. Skirting an easel with a canvas showing a bunch of magenta grapes reclining on a liver-colored plate, he collided with a female in an orange smock, Mexican sandals and harlequin glasses. He spun away from her, barely saving his highball as he pivoted, avoided a thin youth with a manuscript under one arm, and

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By WALKER FIELD

brought up in front of a spacious window overlooking the blue sweep of the Golden Gate, the Bay, and San Francisco on its hills beyond.

He sighed with relief and drank half his highball.

"You're Philip Alden, the lawyer, aren't you?"

Alden turned reluctantly from the restful view, a curt "I beg your pardon" shaping in his larynx.

Doe-soft brown eyes met his. A baby mouth, small but poutingly provocative, opened slightly in expectation of his answer.

"I..." Alden began, and stumbled on the word. "How do you do," he finished awkwardly.

"I can see you don't know me," she bubbled. "Annie Wentworth never gets around to introducing people. It's her only fault. I'm Letty Hawthorne, and I *never* stand on ceremony. We've made a promising beginning, haven't we?"

"Er... yes, haven't we?"

Her upswept honey-colored coiffure framed a face that had survived triumphantly the ministrations of a legion of beauty operators. The green linen frock hugged a ripe, firm figure. "Plenty of money and plenty of beaux," Alden catalogued mentally. "Not young, but on the other hand..."

"It's a *precious* party, isn't it? I love artists! They're quaint."

"Little too precious for me," said Alden.

"You men! But I like it here, anyway, I definitely do. I'm going to *love* Sausalito—"

"You'r new here, Mrs.—er—Miss Hawthorne...?"

She dimpled. "Oh, it's Mrs., all right. Yes, from the East—last month. And a little lonely, if you *must* know... until now." She sighed fleetingly. "Of course, it's been a little bad, recovering..."

"You've been ill?"

"Yes... and no. I might have said 'forgetting'. My husband's death. It was a cruel shock... so sudden..."

Her gaze drifted away and out over the blue, watery reaches.

"I'm sorry," murmured Alden, with sincerity. "Adjustment comes hard, sometimes."

She was sparkling again. "Oh, but I'm going to *love* it here! I've taken the most chichi little house with red-and-white shutters and a simply adorable view, and people here seem so *nice*—" long eyelashes fluttered for him "—so I know I'll be happy."

"Perhaps I can do something toward that worthy end, Mrs. Hawthorne," Alden heard himself say, with amazement.

Now, how had that slipped out? He detested gushing women like this. Oh, well... after all, one was barely forty-one, and a pretty woman, new to town...

"May I get you a cocktail?" he asked.

"Don't bother, Phil, it's taken care of." A cocktail attached to a brawny arm in a sports shirt came between them. Alden's eyes travelled up the arm to a collection of tanned features

and flashing white teeth.

Mrs. Hawthorne's eyes travelled the same route, but with infinitely greater pleasure. "Thank you..." she breathed. "You're *awfully* kind."

"Mrs. Hawthorne, Mr. Mark Taylor." Alden discovered he was irritated.

"How do you do, Mrs. Hawthorne." Taylor glanced amusedly at Alden. "Trust Phil to annex the most attractive woman in the place." The words were flattering; the tone implied that Alden must have scraped the acquaintance somehow, anyhow. Alden flushed.

"Anne told me about you last night; she warned me you'd be here today." Taylor was talking for Letty Hawthorne only, now. "I hadn't planned to come; this arty business isn't my tippie, but—well, you're going to be here a long time, I hear?" His tone said "I hope."

"My God," thought Alden, "what a corny line."

Letty Hawthorne was glowing under it.

"What a *lovely* party! Oh, people here are just the most wonderful folks. Mr. Alden and now, *you*." She said it softly. The eyelashes were working. "You look as if you spend no end of time in the open, Mr. Taylor. You're *awfully* brown and hard, aren't you?" She turned to dimple at Alden. "This is a wonderful place for sports, I'll bet."

"Don't ask Phil," laughed Taylor. "He spends all his time in a law-office over in the city."

"And that pegs *me*," thought Al-

den. "The dry-as-dust old family solicitor, peering over piles of law-books."

"I've got a little shack over on Belvedere," Taylor was saying to Letty. "Pretty fair grounds and view and so on. How about coming over tomorrow afternoon for a swim?"

She was ecstatic. "It sounds perfectly divine! I'd so love to come..."

"Doing anything tomorrow, Phil?"

"I'll make you happy and say 'yes'," said Alden, and had the satisfaction of seeing Taylor flush under his tan. "Going over to the city," he added, on the spur of the moment.

He excused himself a few moments later, pleading work at home, reflecting with wry amusement on the fact that he should be piqued over Taylor's cocktail-party conquest of a woman who gave every promise of being a maddening bore.

But her figure *was* irreproachable, Alden was thinking as he went out the door. The last sound he heard was her high girlish laugh.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT of the Hawthorne-Taylor nuptials was a real surprise to Alden, although during the two months since Anne Wentworth's cocktail party, he had seen a lot of both Letty Hawthorne and Mark Taylor.

Whether it was that Letty used him as a foil to whip up Taylor's interest, or whether she genuinely liked him, Alden couldn't tell. He was a lonely man, and invitations to

Mark's "shack"—which had eighteen rooms, a boathouse and a swimming-pool—and to Letty's little house, came with regularity, and he accepted them. Alden found himself entertained, and gradually accepted the fact that he wasn't really interested in Letty Hawthorne, after all.

He knew Mark was interested—although the yachtsman was some years younger than she—but he hadn't expected it to reach the orange-blossom stage. It did, however, and after the wedding, Letty gave up her house and she and Mark Taylor settled down in the Taylor mansion on Belvedere. There was no honeymoon. Why, Letty pointed out reasonably, should she go on a wedding trip when her new home was practically a tourist attraction in itself? "Tourist attraction" were hardly the words for the sacrosanct environs of Belvedere, but the sailing, swimming from the private beach, and the tennis on Mark Taylor's own grass court were certainly unequalled at most highly-touted watering places.

After the ceremony Alden tactfully refrained from calling, and nearly a month had elapsed when his secretary buzzed, late one Friday afternoon, to say that Mrs. Taylor was on the wire. Alden picked up his telephone.

"Hello," he said. "Letty?"

"Hello, Phil!" came Letty's high, light voice.

"Hello, Letty. Still a bride?"

"Still a bride, Phil. I haven't turned into a wife yet. With Mark, what girl could?"

"Fine. Let me congratulate you all over again." Marriage had changed Letty, he decided. Some of the flutter and froth was gone . . .

"What are you doing tomorrow afternoon, Phil? Because if you're free, we'd like to see you for tea. And I think Mark has just a teeny bit of business he wants to talk to you about, too."

Tea was waiting, next afternoon, on the glassed-in terrace overlooking Richardson's Bay, the smaller extension of San Francisco Bay which separates plebein Sausalito and plush Belvedere. Green lawns dropped away to the brink of the low, serrated cliffs which made the seaward boundary of Taylor's place. In the notched opening where a small ravine broke the cliffs, a boathouse stood. Mark Taylor's yawl, the *Artemis*, white paint gleaming, rose and fell alongside the little wharf. A stiff breeze was chopping in through the Golden Gate.

"Cream or lemon, Philip?" Letty hovered over the table.

"Lemon." Alden felt monosyllabic. He inspected Taylor's other guest, a man he had known hitherto by reputation only.

"Cream or lemon, Mr. Vanno?" There was a note of real doubt in Letty's voice.

"Cream of Kentucky, you mean? Or Highland Cream? I'll pass on the tea. Ha, ha!"

Alden's dislike for Angelo Vanno, based hitherto only on his reputation as the maestro of the notorious Redwood Club in South San Francisco,

deepened as he regarded the gambler's squat, swarthy person planted in a deck-chair.

"I'll get you a highball, Angelo," said Mark Taylor hastily.

"More my dish." As Mark disappeared into the house, he turned a large smile on Letty. "Speakin' o' dishes, Mark did all right when he got married, Mrs. Taylor."

It was obviously intended for a compliment. Alden bent over his tea-cup and Letty flushed bright red. Mark's return with a drink saved the situation. Alden eyed the man and wondered.

Conversation lagged. Finally Vanno finished his drink and stood up.

"Gotta get goin', Taylor. Date in the city." He paused, his polished black eyes on Taylor, who returned his look with a rather pale smile.

"By the way," he said, negligently, "I'd like it if you could take care o' that little matter I mentioned, by next week."

"I'll see you about it Thursday, Angelo." Taylor's voice was assured, but Alden thought he sensed a note of something else in it. Fear . . . ?

Then the gambler was gone. His car roared down the drive and vanished. Taylor chuckled.

"Great guy, Vanno," he said. "Met him over at Bay Meadows. Matter of fact, he put me on to several winners there. Rough diamond, but a mighty good sort."

"I think he's very uncultured," said Letty, positively. "He didn't want tea at all. Well!" She beamed at them. "Isn't it jolly, just the three

of us here together?"

"Certainly is," Taylor agreed. "Matter of fact, Phil, I want to talk to you about a little legal business. A will."

"Wills, is it?"

"I've told Mark I don't like wills. There's something so—so *unhealthy* about them! But Mark simply insists on it."

"It's very sensible of him," said Alden.

"Well . . . I suppose . . ."

"It needn't be anything elaborate, Phil," Taylor said. "Just a simple document stating that I leave all my property to Letty. If anything happens to—"

"Well, if Mark does that," she broke in, "I want you to make out a will for me, too, Phil, leaving everything I have to Mark."

"But Letty . . ." Taylor hesitated. "I don't like you to . . ."

"But I insist, darling. And it's wise, too, isn't it, Philip?"

Taylor's laugh was a little forced. "Phil will think I married you for your money."

She colored. "Well, I *do* have a little," she said spiritedly. "But—goodness, what I *don't* know about money and business! It's—well, it's just abysmal. I mean . . ."

"Well, anyway," said Taylor brusquely, "just some simple document which makes my intention clear. You know the form, Phil. And of course, if Letty insists . . ."

"But I *do* insist!" She hugged his arm. "We'll have twin wills! How's that?"

Alden laughed. "All right," he said. "I'll take care of it. I'll have the papers drawn up and ready for witnessing and signing the fore part of next week."

"Well, that's that. Now, no more business." Letty held up the teapot. "More, Philip?"

"Yes, please."

While she poured, Taylor was strolling restlessly about. He peered through the plate-glass at the white-capped waters of the little bay, with Alcatraz in the distance.

"How about a sail?" He suggested. "Wonderful brisk breeze. What about it, Phil?"

"Oh, Mark . . . it's so rough!"

Taylor grinned crookedly. "Letty's idea of a sail is to sit becalmed, half a mile offshore." He turned to Alden. "My wife has perfect confidence in me, you see!"

"Oh, Mark! It isn't that. You're making fun of me, aren't you? I trust you completely. But I'm—I'm just not the athletic type."

Taylor lifted an eyebrow at Alden. "I've been trying to get her out for a trip ever since we met. The *Artemis* has been tied up all spring, waiting."

"I'm silly, I know." Letty laughed self-consciously. "Well, I am going out, and soon. What's more, Phil, I'm going to make Mark teach me how to handle the *Artemis* myself! So there!"

"I'll be watching for your sails on the Bay." Alden rose to go. "Thanks for the tea, and I'll have the papers ready for you in a few days."

Taylor went with him to the door. "I'd rather you didn't say anything to anyone about Vanno being here, Phil," he said, as they shook hands.

"Why . . . of course not . . ." murmured Alden.

"Fact is," Taylor went on, in a low, rather hurried voice, "I didn't ask him here at all. He came by on his own hook. Rather presuming on a paddock acquaintanceship. He's not a bad sort for a day at the races, but I wouldn't want my name coupled with his on any sort of pretext."

"Better not have any business dealings with him, in that case," Alden suggested, bluntly.

"What do you mean?" Taylor's tone was sharp. His eyes slitted.

"Well . . ." Alden shrugged. "I couldn't help hearing what he said when he was leaving. It's no business of mine, Mark, but since you broached the topic yourself, I'll give you some free advice: stay away from Angelo Vanno. His name smells."

Taylor was smiling tolerantly again. "Don't worry. Well, thanks for everything, Phil. Plan to have dinner with us when the will's drawn up, why don't you?"

"Thanks, I'd like to."

Alden got into his car. As he stepped on the starter, he noticed the marks in the gravel where Vanno's tires had scuffed into a racing start.

ALDEN SAW the "twin wills" through the usual procedures and forgot about them. An important patent infringement suit came to trial in the Federal jurisdiction, and for

several weeks he spent his days in court and his evenings and week-ends at the office over the paper-work in the case.

Occasionally, driving through town toward the Gate bridge of a morning, or on the rare evenings when he left early to work at home, he caught a glimpse of either Mark or Letty Taylor in the streets of Sausalito, and waved.

One day, snatching a quick bite at noon in a Geary Street dairy lunch, he ran into Anne Wentworth, and she asked if he had seen the Taylors recently.

"Not a chance, Anne," Alden replied. "I'm into this case fathoms deep. I fight for time to eat and sleep in. Soon, be wound up, thank heavens. How are they, by the way?"

Anne Wentworth shrugged. "I haven't the faintest notion. No one I know has so much as spoken to the Taylors, lately. They seem to have the 'Don't Disturb' sign out." She hesitated. "I have heard one or two things," she said. "Servants gossip, probably. The word is that it isn't working out for them."

"I'm sorry about that." Alden was genuinely concerned. "Of course, Letty's not the one I'd have matched with Mark Taylor—but they seemed to be making a real go of it, last time I saw 'em."

Anne sighed. "Well, I'm sure I don't know, and don't take my word for anything. I have seen the *Artemis* on the Bay several times, with two people on her, recently. Maybe they're just enjoying one another's

company."

"Shouldn't wonder." Alden paid his check with a frown, and said good-bye. During a recess that afternoon, he sifted a bit of news he had heard a few days earlier. He had been swapping legal shoptalk with a tableful of brother attorneys at dinner in Fred Solari's, and the subject of legacies had come up. Old Matthew Sheppard, of Sheppard, Lyons & Sheppard had happened to mention a will which was probated while he was in New York, the previous winter. "A whopper!" he said. "Chap named Hawthorne died suddenly. Wealthy retired copper magnate. When they totted up the estate, there was eighteen millions in cash and securities, mostly government bonds. A sweet haul for the widow!"

"What was her name?"

Alden asked the question so eagerly that Sheppard laughed.

"Relax, Phil . . . some young squirt's probably married her already. Better resign yourself to bachelorhood and the hard-earned but legitimate income of a barrister."

Alden had flushed, and the talk had shifted to other topics.

Now, with Anne Wentworth's "servants' gossip" fresh in his mind, he thought of the incident again—and of something else.

Odd, come to think of it, that double will business with the Taylors . . . It was perfectly normal, and sound practice, for Mark Taylor to draw up a will. For Letty to make her will was not quite so ordinary. Under the California community

property law, all property acquired by either marriage partner *after* marriage was jointly owned. But the law did not extend to property owned by either partner *prior* to their marriage . . .

The pounding of the gravel called him back to the business of the trial, and he forgot about the Taylors' affairs.

But he remembered them again, with even more force, two nights later. The case was finished and Judge Gastaine would be several days in arriving at his decision. Alden felt empty, physically and mentally. He sought out a quiet, side-street restaurant for dinner, wanting only to relax.

It was an old and famous restaurant, one which drew its patrons with the excellence of its food rather than the novelty of its murals. Diners took their meals in small curtained cubicles which recalled that time-honored Victorian institution, the "private dining-room."

As the maitre d'hotel showed Alden to a cubicle, a waiter carrying two cups of black coffee parted the curtains of one of the small compartments and Alden was startled to see Mark Taylor seated at the table. Before his lips could shape a greeting, he identified the squat Latin figure across from Taylor; it was Angelo Vanno.

Neither man had seen Alden.

The maitre-dee ushered him into the adjoining cubicle, and as he sat down, Alden could not help hearing Vanno's bass rumble:

"Where's this place o' yours?"

"Alameda County—down the east shore," Taylors voice answered.

There was the sound of a match scratching. Alden firmly squelched any scruples about eavesdropping and strained his ears eagerly. He smelled cigar smoke, and then Vanno said:

"I'll run down t'morrow an' look 'em over."

"I'd rather—" Mark Taylor's voice was tentative, indecisive. "I mean, do you have to?"

"After all, Taylor," Vanno said, "I gotta see these nags, don't I? I ain't gonna take 'em sight unseen, am I? Well, all right, then."

After a pause, Taylor's voice said "I simply thought, as long as you've seen the breeding registries and know their pedigrees . . ."

Vanno's heavy, confident laugh covered the last words.

"Oh, I know they're good nags, Taylor. What I want to know is, *how* good. Y'see what I mean, Taylor? It might make a difference, see? A big difference."

"Okay," he heard Taylor say. "I'll ring you in the morning."

There was a sound of silver chinking against crockery and then chairs were pushed back. The partition behind Alden shook violently.

"You don't forget to call me, Taylor," Vanno's voice said. "So long, Taylor."

There was no answer from Mark. Footsteps went away along the aisle.

Alden felt chilled. He recalled stories current around town, instances of men who had fallen into Vanno's

debt over the green tables in the South San Francisco resort, and failed to pay up. They were not pretty stories.

"You don't forget to call me, Taylor," Vanno had said. Had the words been a threat?

Philip Alden determined to call on the Mark Taylors, soon.

Next morning, clad in dungarees and jersey, he strolled down the steep, sunlit street from his hillside bachelor cottage, and into the Ferry Drug Company's emporium.

He heard the voices as he entered. Despite the knowledge he was eavesdropping, Alden nevertheless turned sharply aside and pretended to be surveying the garish magazine display. It was Letty talking, on a high, strained note.

" . . . But I tell you, Mark, you're just imagining it! There's nothing of the sort anywhere on the place, and you very well know I hate having the stuff around! You hear all kinds of stories of how it gets mixed up with food."

Taylor growled something at her. Her voice carried, and everyone in the store was watching them. She took it up again.

"But I'm *sure* there are no rats in the boathouse. I *hate* the nasty things. If there were any, I'd know it. I . . . I simply can't *bear* the thought of that poison around!"

"I don't see why you have to go into a three act tragedy just because I want to buy some rat poison," Taylor muttered between set teeth. He was obviously furious.

Alden had heard enough. "Hello, you two," he said casually. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, hello, Alden." Mark had never been cooler.

"Philip!" Letty's delight was almost tearful. "It's been so *long*! When are you coming to see us?"

Taylor said nothing. His failure to supplement his wife's invitation was almost brutally pointed.

Alden ignored Taylor's attitude. "As soon as I figet squared away from this case I've just finished. By the way," he added casually, "didn't I see you in town last night?"

There was a flash in Taylor's eyes, but it was Letty who answered. "Oh, did you see Mark? He didn't tell me."

"Must have been two other guys," said Taylor lightly. "Well, have to be pushing along, now. We're going sailing this afternoon," he added, "and we won't be back until late."

The implication was pretty obvious, but the following afternoon Alden presented himself unannounced at the house on Belvedere.

"Picked up some fresh lobster on the wharf this morning," he said, "and there's too much for an old bachelor like me. Thought you might help me eat 'em. I do a fair job on lobster Newburg."

"Why, Phil Alden, if you aren't the most thoughtful person!" Letty had come in from the terrace, and Alden thought that her whole face brightened. How perfectly sweet of you! We'll have a real feast!"

"Might as well, Phil," said Tay-

lor gruffly, "as long as you're here."

"Well, thanks!" Alden relaxed a bit. "If you're sure I'm not intruding . . ."

"Intruding? Of course not!" She took the bundle of lobster from him. "And you can certainly prepare the lobster."

"Glad to," grinned Alden, "I won't be in Anna's way?"

"Ann's gone," said Taylor curtly.

"But . . . I thought she was supposed to be 'the perfect cook' . . ."

"She was, Philip." The worried look was back again on Letty's face. "We were very well satisfied. But she didn't seem satisfied with us . . . in fact, they've *all* gone . . . Anna, and Elsie and Otto, the handyman. I don't know why . . ." Her voice quavered a little. "They just walked out and left us!"

"It's the new plastics plant over at San Rafael." Taylor dismissed it with an offhand tone. "Can't say I blame 'em. Nobody'll be able to keep a servant when they really get into production."

"But I *really* can't imagine *Anna* working with *plastics*."

"For heavens sake, Letty, stop making a mystery of everything!" Taylor jerked out his chair and prowled around the room. "This isn't getting dinner ready."

"Of course, Mark. I'll tell you," she added, with a desperate gaiety, "Phil, you fix the lobster, that's your specialty. I'll do the vegetables. Mark, you stem the strawberries—please?"

The work in the kitchen helped

some. But dinner, when they sat down together, was a strained, unnatural meal. Alden regretted coming; he made the best of the awkward silences, Taylor's surliness, Letty's pathetic, irrelevant snatches of conversation.

"How about the two of you coming fishing with me on Saturday?" he said, into a silence.

"Oh . . . I don't know . . ." Letty was doubtful. "I . . . I still don't like the water. Although I try terribly hard, don't I Mark? I've been learning to manage the *Artemis*, Phil, and I'm improving. I don't write my name in the wake any more, do I, Mark?"

"She's got a good hand on the tiller," admitted Taylor, with unexpected graciousness. "She did a real job, bringing her into the Bay the other day—came through the channel with the breeze against her, under sail."

"Oh! I was terrified! But I was *proud* of myself." She sounded like the old Letty for a moment. "We'll come fishing with you, Philip. I'm not really afraid, I guess. Just imagine I am."

She brought on strawberries for dessert, and coffee.

"Let me help you with the dishes," insisted Alden.

She stood up briskly. "Woman's work, Phil! You two can clear away and dry." She walked toward the pantry-door. "Phil, will you . . ."

Her voice broke, with a gasp. Alden saw her stagger against the sideboard, supporting herself with

one hand. He dashed toward her. "Letty! What's wrong?"

Taylor, who was lighting a pipe, had glanced up. In an instant, he was at her side.

"What's the matter, Lett . . . ?"

"I . . . I don't know." Her breathing was short. "Something I ate . . ." She tried to laugh, and gasped instead.

"She'd better lie down!" exclaimed Alden. His heart beat hard. A hard suspicion was crystallizing into conviction.

"I'll carry her upstairs," said Taylor. "Call a doctor, will you?"

"Mark!" Her voice emerged as a thin, agonized whisper. "I . . . I'm afraid I . . . I'm poisoned . . ."

MARK TAYLOR came back from showing Dr. Potter to the door and found Alden waiting in the long living-room. It was black night outside, now.

"She'll be all right," he said. "But—arsenic poisoning! Great heavens, Phil! You think Potter knows what he's talking about?"

"I'm sure he does," said Alden coolly.

"But I don't understand . . ."

Alden's voice was icy. "Not very hard to understand, Taylor. Letty ate arsenic. How or where, we don't know. But it's not difficult to guess."

"But we all ate the same meal. Good Lord . . . do you suppose we're poisoned, Phil?"

"I feel fine," said Alden coolly. "And I must say *you* appear to be

perfectly comfortable."

"But how—"

"Let's be logical about this," said Alden. "We all ate lobster Newburg. I prepared it. We all ate souffled spinach and lyonnaise potatoes. *Letty* cooked those. And we all ate strawberries. *You* prepared the strawberries. Now, the lobster and the vegetables were in platters, and we each helped ourselves. So if any poison was in any of that food, we'd all be sick. But the strawberries, Mark . . ."

"See here, Alden, are you suggesting . . . ?"

" . . . the strawberries," went on Alden, "were put on the table in separate dishes. The poison *could* have been slipped into Letty's dish, and her dish only."

"Damn it, Alden! You've got no right to accuse me like this," Taylor was furiously angry. "You're fixing up a case against me!"

"Nothing of the sort," said Alden. "I'm not accusing you of anything. 'In any event, I think you might worry less about your own skin and more about your wife.'"

"I can take care of her myself, thanks."

"I think you'd better get someone to help you." Alden started for the door. "I'll send Mrs. Halstead over from town. She's an experienced practical nurse."

"What I've always appreciated about you, Phil," said Taylor bitterly, "is the way you mind your own business."

"Well, good night," said Alden.

"Mrs. Halstead will be along as soon as I can get her."

He decided to walk home around the end of Richardson's Bay. Suppose the doctor's laboratory analysis showed that the arsenic had been in Letty's strawberry-dish . . . ? Was it a matter for the police, then?

Alden dismissed that thought. Not unless he was prepared to charge someone with something. He wasn't.

What he had, he decided, was (1) a general impression, based on the drugstore scene, his observations today, plus Anne Wentworth's gossip, that all was not well between the Taylors; and (2) the extremely suspicious event of Letty's poisoning. If she should die—then his testimony concerning the afternoon's happenings could make it look very nasty for Mark Taylor.

But she wasn't going to die, the doctor had said. On that basis, whoever put arsenic in Letty Taylor's dish of strawberries had botched the job. Or had they . . . ?

Alden leaned into the hard, cold wind blowing damply in from the Gate. A new thought occurred to him, with such sudden force that he stopped still on the lonely road, under dark whipping eucalypti. *Had the job been botched, after all?*

He started walking again, hurrying. When he reached home, he called the practical nurse and told her about the need for her at the Taylor's. Then he placed a call to the San Francisco Herald and talked for ten minutes to a friend on the

telegraph desk.

Next morning he was off for the city early. He went first to the offices of Sheppard, Lyons & Sheppard, and had a talk with Matt Sheppard. From there, ignoring lunch, he went straight to the periodical room of the San Francisco City Library, and spent nearly three hours over back newspaper files.

When he finished, he sought out a public telephone and placed a call to the Taylor's residence.

Mrs. Halstead answered the phone. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Alden," she said. "No, she'd better not talk, right now. For a fact, she's asleep. But she's fine. It's passin' off first-rate. She's got a good, healthy constitution, that one."

"She'll be in bed for awhile longer . . . ?"

"Oh, yes. Until day after tomorrow, anyway."

"Where's Mr. Taylor?"

"Gone to Oakland, he said. Said he might not be back until late."

"Thank you, Mrs. Halstead."

He was unable to sleep, that night. Finally, as it was growing light, he dropped off, and when he awakened he saw with a start that it was past noon.

Alden jumped up, ran to the phone and called the Taylor home.

"She's not here, Mr. Alden." Mrs. Halstead's voice sounded worried.

"Not there!" roared Alden. "What do you mean, she's not there?"

"She—why, Mr. Alden!—they went for a sail. She woke up this

mornin', sayin' she felt no end good, and wanted a breath of air, and they left, oh, no ten minutes ago . . ."

Alden hung up and threw his clothes on without regard to condition or appearance. A minute or two, and he plunged down the steep hill at the wheel of his car and headed north along the highway beside the Bay.

A thick, early-summer fog had rolled in from the ocean during the night, masking everything from sight. Alden cursed, and switched on his headlights. Sailing, in this stuff! Was Mark Taylor mad? Perhaps so. What a fool he, Alden, had been, not to go straight there, last night!

He missed two oncoming pairs of headlights by last-minute wrenches of the wheel, and nearly overshot the Belvedere turnoff, amid the thick whiteness. He got off the highway onto the side road by burning his tires in a quick stop, and raced around the head of the Bay.

He ran from his car to the Taylor front door. Mrs. Halstead was no help. With an ill-mannered exclamation of impatience Alden turned from her, and ran down the dim path toward the boathouse, through the whiteness.

He ran along the soft sand of the little beach toward the boathouse—and halted. For the *Artemis* was in her berth. Her masts, spars and furled sails were ghostly but tangible through the drifting mists.

She had not left the boathouse today, it was clear . . .

Alden moved slowly, now. And

then, as he crept toward the boathouse, he heard sounds—footsteps, heavy breathing, the sound of something heavy, dragging . . .

She looked up, as Alden burst through the door, and for an instant there was pure terror in her eyes. Then, in an instant, she was the old Letty.

Oh! Philip! I'm so glad you've come."

"You won't have to drag the body aboard, Letty."

"I . . . what? Oh, Philip, something dreadful's happened to Mark. I . . . I'm so upset, I hardly know how to tell you, I . . . I think I'm going to . . ."

"Come on, Letty!" His voice was harsh. He seized her arm in a tight grip. "No phony faints!"

"You're hurting my arm!"

"Get over there at the far end!"

He gave her a violent shove toward the wharf-door, and bent over the body of Mark Taylor. There was a great lump at the base of the skull, and blood oozed from it slowly. Alden ran a hand inside the man's shirt. There was pulse, slow but regular.

He looked up, to see Letty Taylor, a heavy oar in her hands, coming toward him, her small, baby features contorted with hate and viciousness and fear.

Alden was a big man. He lost a little skin to her sharp nails but a short scuffle disposed of her.

"You can't prove anything!"

She cowered on the planking and snarled it at him.

"I think we can!" He jerked her onto her feet. "Come on!"

"TELL ME about it, Phil." Under sheriff Marty Mattoon swung back in his chair in the Marin county building in San Rafael. "How did you know enough to be there at just that time?"

"Partly luck." Secure in the knowledge that Mark Taylor was safe, and that Letty was in a cell downstairs, Philip Alden relaxed a little. It was early evening, and the fog had cleared.

"Partly luck," he repeated. "If I'd remembered to set an alarm clock, I'd have gotten out to the Taylor place before Letty left for her 'sail' with Mark, and forced a postponement of her plans until I was gone. My oversleeping was the piece of luck in the thing."

"What made you suspect her?"

"Well, I got to thinking, the night she came down with poisoning. Why would anyone be foolish enough to try that kind of poisoning in front of an audience? And why, having tried it, didn't they make the dose large enough?"

"Did you think earlier that Taylor was trying to get rid of his wife?"

Alden grinned ruefully. "I certainly did. Everything pointed to it. Her will was made out in Taylor's favor and it was pretty obvious from the first that she wasn't exactly destitute. Another thing—I had good reason to think that Taylor owed a gambling debt to Angelo Vanno. Vanno hinted at something

which could have meant that, one day at Mark's place, several weeks ago. When I ran across Vanno and Taylor in a side-street restaurant over in the city the other night, I'd have bet on it. If Mark were in deep water with Vanno, and Letty's will made out to him . . ." He spread his hands.

Mattoon nodded his head slowly. "A dilly of a motive," he agreed soberly.

"Actually," Alden continued. "Mark was a little short of money. I learned that less than an hour ago, from him. He was arranging to sell Vanno some of the blooded racing stock down on the old Taylor ranch in Alameda County. I guess he was a little ashamed of dealing with a man like Vanno, and tried to soft-pedal it, and of course that made me even more suspicious."

"I don't know if Letty had any inkling of the Vanno business, but it wouldn't have made any difference in her plans—it would simply have fitted in to her whole picture. First, the will, which gave Taylor a first rate motive; then that scene in the drugstore, deliberately manufactured for any ears that might happen to hear it. She'd already driven away the servants, to give her a clear field. And, of course, there was her big play of being afraid of the water, afraid to go sailing."

"So then she poisoned herself," supplied Mattoon.

"So then she poisoned herself—and after I'd gone into a tizzy over that, and out of it again, I stopped simmering and started thinking.

Then was when I remembered what old Matt Sheppard had said about the eighteen-million-dollar Hawthorne legacy in New York. I remembered wondering at the time if that mightn't have been Letty's first husband.

"And then, yesterday, I checked the New York papers, and got set clear back on my heels! Hawthorne wasn't Letty's first husband, Marty; he was *second*. And *both* Hawthorne and the other poor guy he succeeded had died in—sailing accidents!"

Mattoon whistled.

"They picked Hawthorne up on a beach in Florida," Alden went on. "The other guy never did turn up. He and Letty went out in a yawl off Cap Cod, and she came back without him, weeping but brave. He was very wealthy, too. Probably poor Mark was due to be swept out through the Gate."

"The dame's money-mad," said Mattoon positively.

"She's mad, all right," agreed Alden. "But she thinks men are *wonderful*."

"And why not?" he added.

Film directors, as well as movie stars, are counted as regular dialers to "Suspense," both for entertainment and because of the unusual dramatic techniques employed on radio's outstanding theater of thrills.

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